



Wisconsin Department Of Natural Resources

Fisheries Information Sheet

Eagle River Chain, Vilas County, 2025

Fisheries Management Information

The Eagle River Chain of Lakes (Eagle Chain) is managed primarily to sustain quality walleye and muskellunge fisheries. The Eagle Chain's walleye population is sustained by natural reproduction, while the muskellunge population is supplemented with stocking. A moderate-to-high density walleye population will promote quality panfish, characterized by low-to-moderate numbers and strong proportions of keeper-sized fish. Eagle Chain lakes are classified as either complex-cool-dark (Cranberry, Catfish, Eagle, Scattering Rice) or complex-riverine (Otter, Lynx, Duck, Yellow Birch) lake systems.

Survey Information

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted netting and electrofishing surveys throughout the Eagle Chain targeting adult walleye (late April), adult muskellunge (late April-early May) and adult bass (mid-May). This report combines species results across lakes for a chain-wide comparison. More in-depth results can be found in lake-specific reports (search fisheries survey reports on the DNR website).

Walleye

Adult walleye (sexually mature or ≥ 15 inches) population estimates ranged from 1.3 to 10.3 per acre across lakes, with the majority of lakes having densities above 5 adults per acre (Table 1). Results indicate the Eagle Chain contains strong, naturally-reproducing walleye fisheries characterized by high densities and size distributions dominated by small-to-moderate sized fish.

Table 1. 2025 Eagle Chain adult walleye population statistics.

Lake	Adult Population Estimate (no./acre)	% Adults ≥ 15 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	4.2	27	27
Catfish	7.2	27	28
Eagle	7.2	17	26
Scattering Rice	1.6	87	27
Otter	7.2	19	25
Lynx	10.3	55	26
Duck	1.3	58	22
Yellow Birch	7.9	23	25

Muskellunge

Survey efforts across the Eagle Chain resulted in the capture of adult muskellunge (sexually mature or ≥ 30 inches) at relatively high rates overall, ranging between 0.7 and 3.7 per net-night (Table 2). Adult muskellunge catch rates across Cranberry, Catfish, Eagle, and Scattering Rice fell between the 50th and 99th percentiles within the complex-cool-dark lake class, while adult catch rates across Otter, Lynx, Duck, and Yellow Birch were all above the 90th percentile within the complex-riverine lake class. Size distributions of the muskellunge populations were comprised of many 30 to 40-inch fish, with good numbers of young recruits and a few larger individuals up to 49 inches. These results are characteristic of a high-density muskellunge fishery.

Table 2. 2025 Eagle Chain adult muskellunge population statistics.

Lake	Adult Catch Rate (number/net-night)	% Adults ≥ 40 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	2.5	15	46
Catfish	1.3	22	43
Eagle	1.7	9	44
Scattering Rice	0.7	10	41
Otter	1.5	22	46
Lynx	2.3	6	49
Duck	3.7	13	47
Yellow Birch	1.3	17	42

Northern Pike

Adult northern pike (sexually mature or ≥ 12 inches) were captured at relatively low rates overall (0.2 – 1.2 per net-night). Adult northern pike catch rates across Cranberry, Catfish, Eagle, and Scattering Rice fell between the 5th and 50th percentiles (all but one rate below the 25th percentile) within the complex-cool-dark lake class, while adult catch rates across Otter, Lynx, Duck, and Yellow Birch were all below the 25th percentile within the complex-riverine lake class. Size distributions of adult northern pike were comprised primarily of moderate-sized fish, as over 70% of pike captured were ≥ 21 inches (Table 3). These results are characteristic of a low-density northern pike fishery.

Table 3. 2025 Eagle Chain adult northern pike population statistics.

Lake	Adult Catch Rate (number/net-night)	% Adults ≥ 21 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	0.7	71	31
Catfish	1.2	73	36
Eagle	0.7	77	30
Scattering Rice	0.5	73	31
Otter	0.5	78	29
Lynx	0.4	100	29
Duck	0.4	75	26
Yellow Birch	0.2	79	32

Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass

Targeted bass electrofishing surveys were conducted on Cranberry, Eagle and Yellow Birch lakes. Adult smallmouth bass (≥ 8 inches) were captured at moderate-to-high rates on Cranberry and Eagle (between the 75th and 90th percentiles for the lake class), and a high rate on Yellow Birch (above the 90th percentile for the lake class). Size distributions of smallmouth bass across the Eagle Chain were comprised mostly of larger-sized fish, with 57% - 80% of adult smallmouth being ≥ 14 inches across individual lakes (Table 4).

Table 4. 2025 Eagle Chain adult smallmouth bass population statistics. A rate of “NA” indicates the population metric was not available for calculation, as an electrofishing survey targeting bass was not conducted on that lake.

Lake	Adult Catch Rate (number/mile)	% Adults ≥ 14 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	3.7	79	20
Catfish	NA	69	19
Eagle	4.0	69	18
Scattering Rice	NA	78	19
Otter	NA	60	18
Lynx	NA	80	20
Duck	NA	57	16
Yellow Birch	19.9	64	19

Few adult largemouth bass (≥ 8 inches) were captured during surveys across the Eagle Chain. Capture rates observed during the targeted bass electrofishing surveys indicate low abundance levels (all catch rates were below the 5th percentile for the respective lake class). Most largemouth captured during the survey were also ≥ 14 inches, characteristic of low population abundances (Table 5).

Table 5. 2025 Eagle Chain adult largemouth bass population statistics. A rate of “NA” indicates the population metric was not available for calculation, as an electrofishing survey targeting bass was not conducted on that lake.

Lake	Adult Catch Rate (number/mile)	% Adults ≥ 14 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	0.2	75	15
Catfish	NA	100	20
Eagle	0.2	100	15
Scattering Rice	NA	100	15
Otter	NA	100	14
Lynx	NA	0	8
Duck	NA	NA	NA
Yellow Birch	0.0	0	11

Bluegill

Targeted bluegill surveys (i.e., late-spring electrofishing) occurred on Cranberry, Eagle and Yellow Birch lakes. Bluegill capture rates ranged between 20.0 and 50.7 fish per mile, indicative of relatively low abundances overall (all catch rates were around the 25th percentile for the respective lake class). Size distributions of bluegill observed across Eagle Chain lakes were moderate, with proportions of fish ≥ 7 inches ranging between 22% and 49% (Table 6).

Table 6. 2025 Eagle Chain bluegill population statistics.

Lake	Catch Rate (number/mile)	% ≥ 7 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	50.7	29	10
Catfish	NA	49	8
Eagle	40.0	26	8
Scattering Rice	NA	24	8
Otter	NA	24	8
Lynx	NA	35	8
Duck	NA	27	8
Yellow Birch	20.0	22	8

Black Crappie

Black crappie were captured at low-to-moderate rates across the Eagle Chain, ranging between 1.0 and 9.6 fish per net-night. Black crappie catch rates across Cranberry, Catfish, Eagle, and Scattering Rice were close to the 50th percentile within the complex-cool-dark lake class, while catch rates across Otter, Lynx, Duck, and

Yellow Birch were between the 10th percentile to just above the 50th percentile within the complex-riverine lake class. Size distributions of black crappie observed across lakes were high, with proportions of fish ≥ 10 inches ranging between 31% and 66% (Table 7).

Table 7. 2025 Eagle Chain black crappie population statistics.

Lake	Catch Rate (number/net-night)	% ≥ 10 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	9.6	31	12
Catfish	5.3	57	13
Eagle	4.3	47	12
Scattering Rice	6.8	66	13
Otter	3.2	65	12
Lynx	7.2	48	12
Duck	2.2	40	10
Yellow Birch	1.0	54	13

Yellow perch

Yellow perch were captured at high rates throughout the Eagle Chain, ranging between 65.9 and 383.8 fish per net-night (catch rates ranged between just below the 90th percentile to as high as above the 99th percentile for the respective lake class). Size distributions of yellow perch observed across lakes were low, with proportions of fish ≥ 8 inches ranging between 12% and 29% (Table 8). Larger perch were present, but high numbers of small fish resulted in overall low proportions of quality-sized fish, a common characteristic of high population densities.

Table 8. 2025 Eagle Chain yellow perch population statistics.

Lake	Catch Rate (number/net-night)	% ≥ 8 inches	Largest Fish (inches)
Cranberry	137.0	12	9
Catfish	74.2	20	9
Eagle	147.2	19	10
Scattering Rice	90.5	13	9
Otter	145.9	29	10
Lynx	365.8	23	10
Duck	65.9	23	12
Yellow Birch	383.8	25	10

Other Species

Other species captured but not directly targeted were black bullhead, bluntnose minnow, burbot, common shiner, creek chub, golden shiner, Iowa darter, mimic shiner, mottled sculpin, pumpkinseed, rock bass, shorthead redhorse, silver redhorse, trout perch, white crappie, white sucker and yellow bullhead.

Fishing Regulations

Table 9. Fishing regulations for muskellunge and walleye on the Eagle Chain, 2025-26. All other species regulations followed those listed for general inland waters.

Species	Season Dates	Daily Bag Limit	Size Limit
Muskellunge	Saturday of Memorial Day weekend – Dec. 31 (open water only)	1	40 inches
Walleye	1 st Saturday in May – 1 st Sunday in March	3 in total	No minimum; fish from 14 to 18 inches may not be kept; only one may be over 18 inches

Contact Information

For questions regarding fisheries management activities on the Eagle Chain, contact Vilas County Fisheries Biologist Eric Wegleitner. For questions about this report, contact Treaty Fisheries Biologist Lawrence Eslinger.

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